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ABSTRACT

This guidebook provides refugees being resettled in the United States with general information about what they will encounter and the services they can receive in their first months in the country. Available in several languages, the book is distributed to overseas processing agencies and refugees overseas who have been approved for U.S. admission. It is also distributed to service providers. Refugees are advised that most Americans value self-reliance and individual responsibility, but that in general people respect those who ask questions about the new culture they are entering. All refugees are assigned to a relocation agency as they enter the country, and housing is made available for the first month. The following topics are addressed: (1) pre-arrival processing; (2) the role of the resettlement agency; (3) community services; (4) housing; (5) transportation; (6) employment; (7) education; (8) health; (9) managing your money; (10) rights and responsibilities of refugees; and (11) cultural adjustment. Among the topics discussed is that of the American educational system, both for children and for adults. A general outline of the public school system includes a discussion of the American tradition of public participation in education. A map of the United States is included. (SLD)

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WELCOME

TO THE UNITED STATES

A Guidebook for Refugees

ED 402 361

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WELCOME
TO THE UNITED STATES

A Guidebook for Refugees

First Edition
1996

Prepared by the Center for Applied Linguistics
Refugee Service Center

The contents of this book were developed and printed under a cooperative agreeement with the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of the U.S. Department of State. The book, however, is not an official publication of the U.S. Department of State.

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Welcome to the United States: A Guidebook for Refugees provides refugees being resettled in the United States with general information about what they will encounter and services they will need during their first months in the country. *Welcome* aims to help these U.S.-bound refugees develop realistic expectations about employment, education, health, and other aspects of life in the United States.

The guidebook was written under the direction of the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Federal and state officials, representatives of resettlement agencies, and recently resettled refugees contributed to the writing of the guide.

Available in several languages, *Welcome* is distributed to overseas processing agencies and to refugees overseas who have been approved for U.S. admission but have not completed their processing. It is also distributed to those who assist refugees during their initial resettlement, so that these service providers are aware of the information their refugee clients receive prior to arrival in the U.S.

Welcome to the United States: A Guidebook for Refugees replaces an earlier publication for refugees, *A Guide to Resettlement in the United States.*

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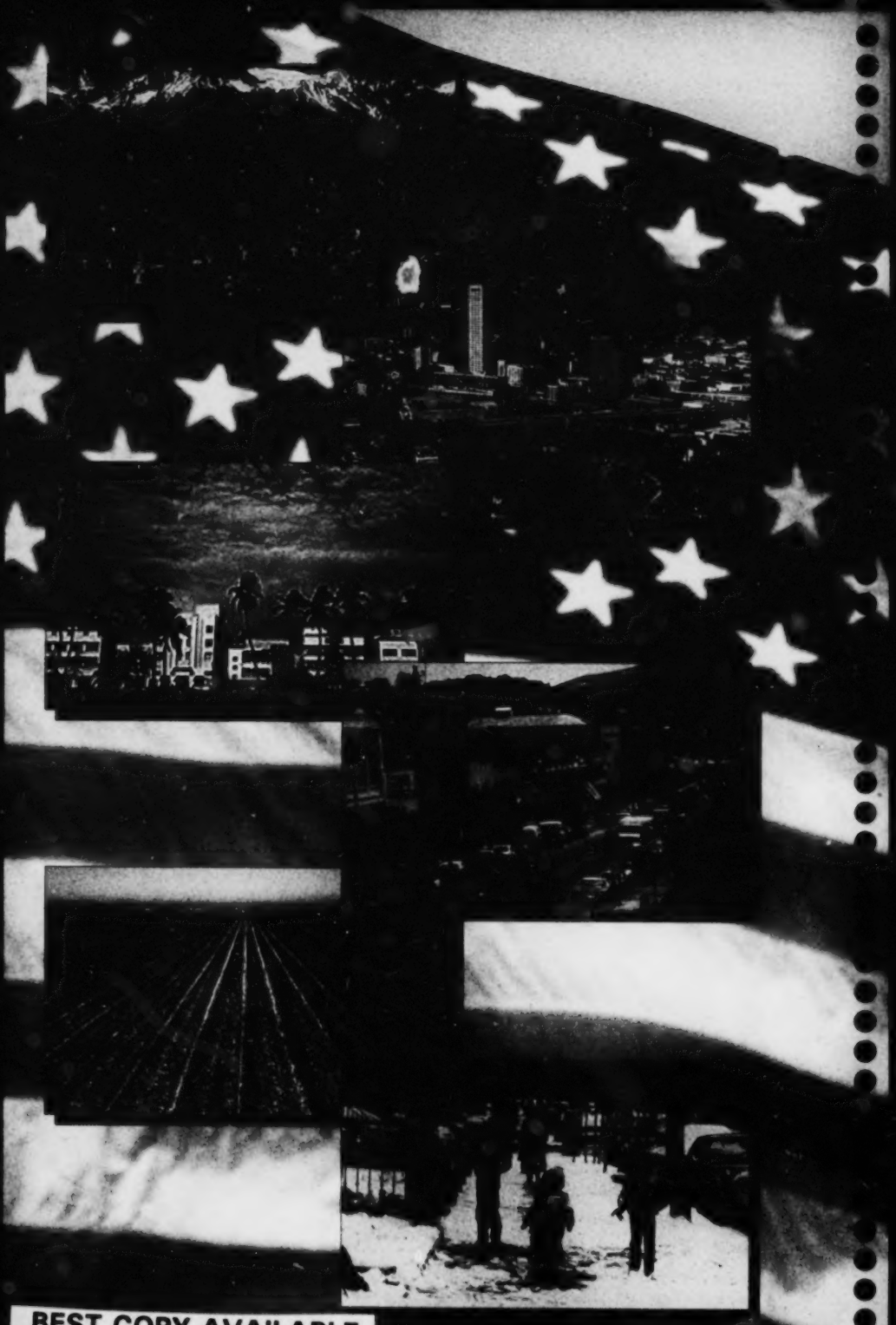

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This guide to resettlement will assist you in preparing for your first few months in the United States. It describes the initial stages of resettlement and provides information on fundamental aspects of life in the United States. No orientation guide can possibly tell you everything you need to know, because resettlement is a long, complicated process that is unique for every individual refugee. If you do not understand something discussed in this book, or if your questions about life in the United States are not answered here, the staff of your resettlement agency will help you find answers after you have arrived. An inquiring, open attitude may be your most valuable asset in adjusting successfully to life in the United States.

We wish you well!

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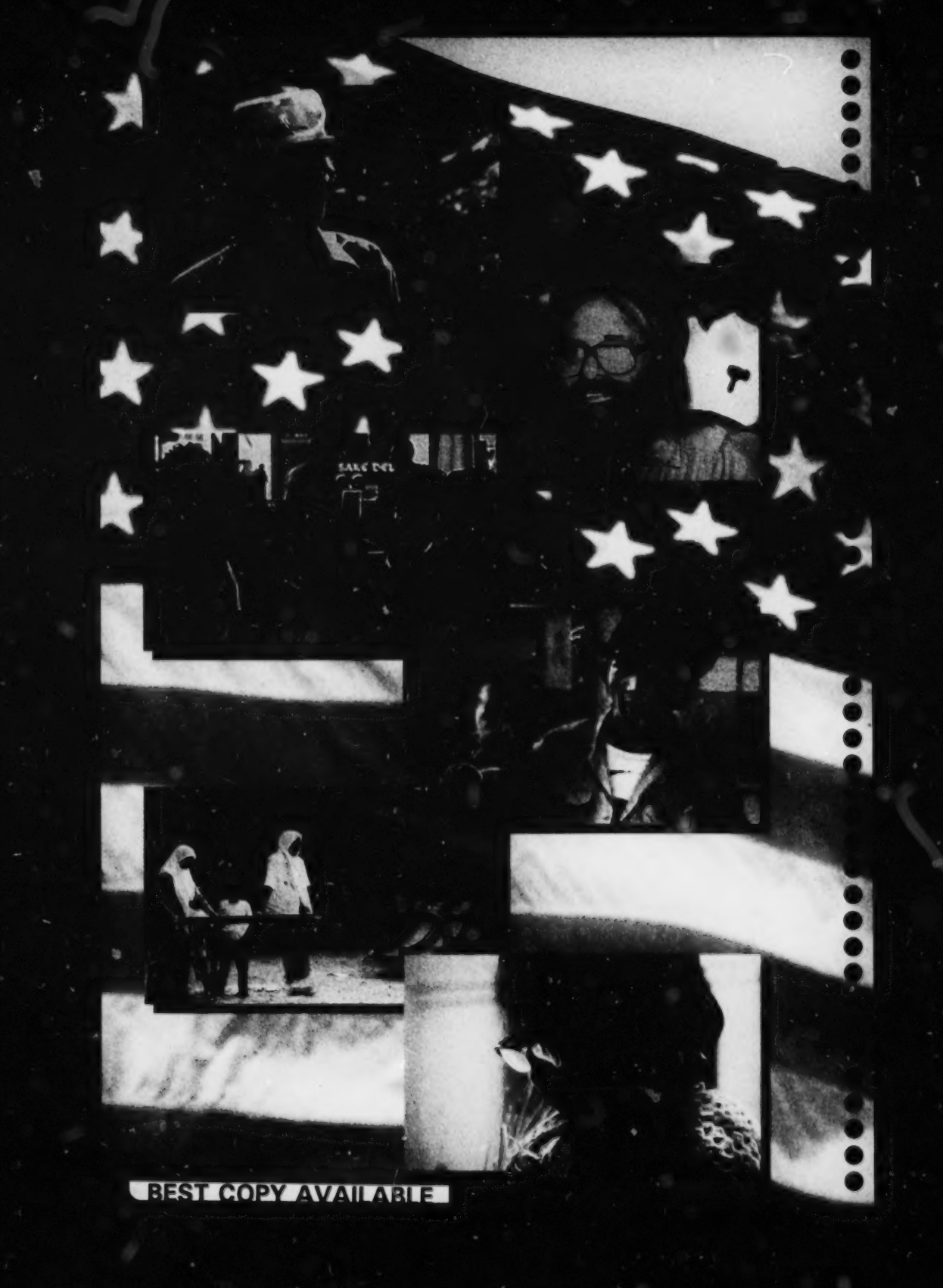
The United States is a large, diverse country, so generalizations about it are difficult to make. It contains within its borders enormous contrasts in geography, a wide range of climates, and a great diversity among the people who call themselves Americans. Americans are of many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and they hold a variety of religious beliefs and values. Consequently, much of what you have heard about America may not be true for you. Even information from friends or others already in the United States may not be true in your case.

Every community in the U.S. is different, and each has its own procedures and system of working with newcomers. Staff members at your resettlement agency will help you learn about your new country and the local community in which you live.

One lesson that you will learn quickly is that most Americans value self-reliance and individual responsibility. You will be expected to go to work as soon as you can find a job and begin to support yourself and your family. Lack of English will not prevent you from working, but you will need to learn more English to progress to a better job. In most communities, you will find classes that will help you take advantage of opportunities for advancement.

A second lesson you will learn is that resettlement is a permanent decision. It is the first step to becoming a permanent resident and a citizen of the United States.



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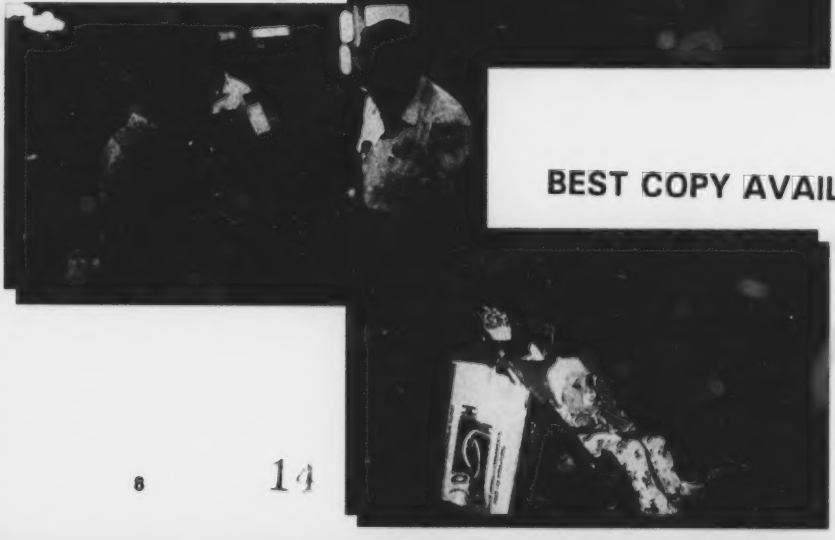
After one year you will be eligible to apply for permanent resident alien status; after four and a half years, you will be eligible to apply for American citizenship.

As a refugee, you may have lost everything, but in the United States you are offered a chance to start over and rebuild your life. Starting over may not be easy, but it can be done. Over a million refugees have come before you, and most have done well. You can succeed also. You bring the gifts of your special talents, your background and culture, and your courage.

Refugees who came before you might share the following advice:

- Keep an open mind.
- Do not rush to make judgments.
- Make every effort to learn and speak English.
- Attempt to understand American culture without criticizing it in comparison to your own.
- Participate in American life.
- Concentrate on how far you have come, not how far you have to go.
- Become employed as soon as possible, and make plans for better employment in the future.

The following chapters contain information about your new life and new country to help you in your resettlement. The information is necessarily brief and is certainly not complete. Remember that although most Americans admire self-reliance, they also respect someone who asks questions. It is the best way to begin learning.



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Now that the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has approved you for admission to the United States, there are only a few more steps before you travel to the United States.

- You and your family must have medical examinations.
- A resettlement agency in the United States must prepare for your arrival so that your move goes smoothly.
- Your trip to the United States will be arranged after all other preparations for your resettlement have been completed.

While you are still awaiting resettlement, processing staff will help make appointments for your medical examinations, ensure that your resettlement agency has adequate information about you and your family, and arrange travel to your destination in the United States. If you will need a wheelchair, crutches, or other kind of special assistance during your trip to the U.S., be sure to tell the processing agency. While you are waiting is a good time to learn as much as you can about the United States and to learn some English, if possible.

Medical Examination

Medical examinations are required for you and your family. In most places, they are free. The medical examination will:

- determine if there are medical problems that must be addressed before departure for the United States,
- ensure that there are no medical conditions that would make you or others in your family ineligible to travel to the United States, and
- give resettlement agencies in the United States information on any medical problems which require follow-up care after you arrive in your new community.

If you do not travel within one year of your medical examination, you must have another one before leaving for the United States.

Pre-Departure Interview

Processing staff will interview you to obtain information to help your resettlement proceed more smoothly. If you have relatives or friends living in the United States, you will be asked to provide their names, addresses, and telephone numbers. If your immediate family, such as a spouse or a child, is already in the United States, you will be resettled in the same town. If your relative in the United States is more distant, such as a cousin, or if you ask to be resettled near a friend, the resettlement agency will make a placement decision which also takes into consideration whether necessary services would be available and whether you would be likely to find employment in that community. If relatives of yours are also being considered for U.S. resettlement, you can request placement in the same community, but there is no guarantee that this will be done.

Be sure to provide as much accurate, up-to-date information as possible to the processing agency prior to your departure, so that the resettlement agency can make the best decision about your resettlement site. After arriving in the United States, you will find it difficult to change quickly to a new site, because such a move is often quite expensive. Also, most resettlement services will be available to you only at your original resettlement site.

Resettlement Agency

A resettlement agency in the United States will be assigned to assist you during the early stages of your resettlement. The agency will receive biographic information on you and your family, including the names, ages, and occupations of family members; your ethnicity, country of origin, and religion; any medical problems which require follow-up attention; and addresses of relatives already in the United States. The resettlement agency will select the town in which you will be resettled, considering such factors as whether you will be

joining other family members already in the United States, the availability of jobs, and the availability of services. You will be told before you leave where you will be living in the United States. Your resettlement agency will ensure that you are met at the airport when you arrive, that housing is ready for you, and that you receive necessary information about your new community. (More detailed information may be found in "Role of the Resettlement Agency," p. 17.)

Travel to the United States

You may make your own travel arrangements, or you may ask the processing staff to arrange your travel. When making your own travel arrangements, you are required to inform processing staff of your travel plans before you leave.

If a processing agency purchases your tickets, the payment for the tickets is a loan which you must repay. Before your departure to the United States, you will sign a promissory note to repay your travel costs. About

three to six months after you arrive in the United States, you will begin to receive monthly bills which allow you to repay this loan over a period of three years. The money you repay goes into a fund which helps other refugees travel to the United States.

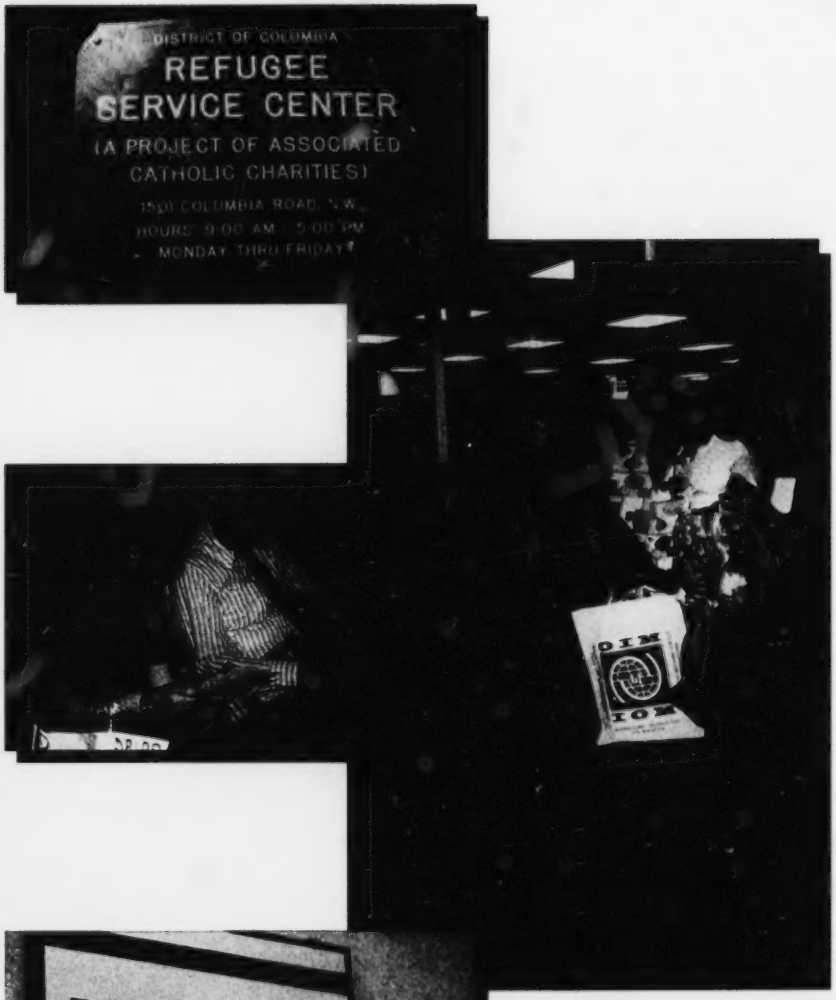
Like other international travelers flying coach class, you and your family will be allowed a maximum weight of baggage per person. Ask the processing staff for the exact rules to follow on your flight. Payment for transport of baggage in excess of that amount is your responsibility and is expensive. If you are taking a pet, you must pay the cost of the pet's transport and follow U.S. Customs laws and airline regulations regarding transport of animals. It is important to inform the processing agency if you are traveling with a pet, so that the resettlement agency in the United States can try to find housing which allows pets.

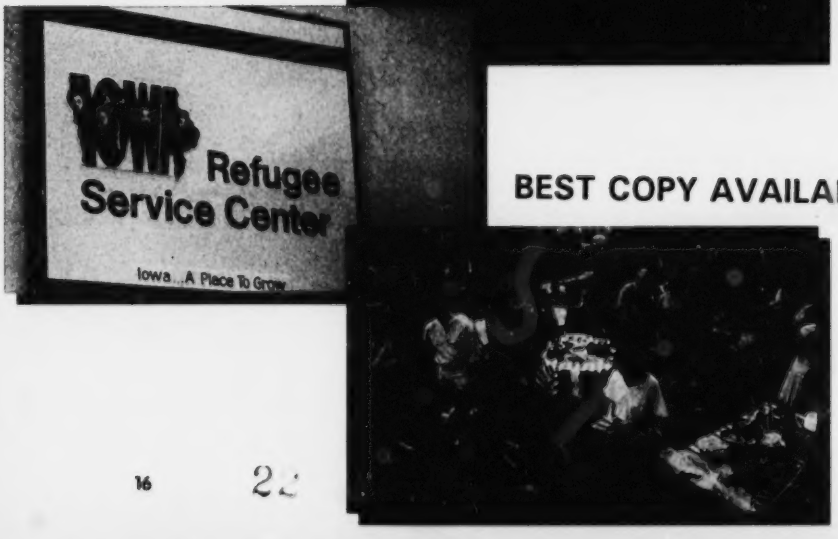
U.S. Customs does not allow anyone to bring certain items into the United States. These include narcotics, fruits, plants, vegetables, and fresh meats. Prescribed medications can be brought in, but should be clearly labeled. If you have questions about what can be taken to the United States, ask the processing staff.

If your journey requires that you go through several transit points, you will be assisted at most points by representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). If you have any difficulties on your journey (for example, if a family member becomes ill),

IOM representatives will assist you and will notify your resettlement agency if your arrival is delayed. In the United States, IOM representatives will meet you at the port of entry and assist you with immigration formalities. They will assist you to get to a connecting flight, if necessary.

Before you depart, you will receive a package of documents required for entry, including immigration, medical, and resettlement documents. Be careful not to lose these documents during your trip. You must carry these documents with you; do not open them or pack them in your suitcase. These documents must be given to immigration officials at the first U.S. airport at which you arrive. There, officials will open the package, inspect the documents, and return some to you. The resettlement agency will ask to see these documents when you arrive at your resettlement site and will make copies of them.





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A unique aspect of the U.S. resettlement program is the collaboration between the government and private organizations. The government sets laws and guidelines and provides funding for some of the services that refugees receive. Resettlement agencies deliver the required services and may offer additional assistance.

Every refugee who is accepted into the United States is assigned a resettlement agency prior to arrival. The resettlement agency may be a religious-based organization, a private organization, a state agency, or an ethnic organization. Your resettlement agency will have a local office in or near the town where you will live, with staff who will assist you. If you have relatives living in the area, they may help in your resettlement. Some agencies have volunteers to assist you when you arrive.

Although some resettlement agencies are affiliated with religious groups, you are not obliged to participate in their religious activities, and resettlement agencies are prohibited from encouraging refugees to join their religious groups.

Upon arrival at your final destination, you will be met at the airport by a relative, a friend, or a representative from your resettlement agency. Housing will have been arranged for you. This may be temporary housing with your relatives or in a hotel, or it may be permanent housing, such as an apartment. (More detailed information may be found in "Housing," p. 27.)

Resettlement workers aided by relatives, friends, and volunteers will help you find your way around your new community. With their help, you will:

- find long-term housing,
- obtain household furnishings and clothing,
- obtain a Social Security card (Proof that you have applied for this card is necessary to begin the search for employment.),
- learn to use the local public transportation system,
- begin to learn about American customs and laws,
- enroll your children in school,
- find a job,
- learn about the U.S. money system,
- arrange for a medical examination or follow-up medical care, if necessary, soon after arrival,
- find English language programs or volunteer tutors, and
- learn about community services available in your area.

Resettlement agencies ensure that all your necessary expenses and basic living costs are covered for the first 30 days in the United States. Some agencies will pay the expenses; others may give the money directly to you or your relative, and you will be expected to pay some or all of your expenses. In addition, the resettlement agency will provide advice and other services for at least 90 days after arrival. After that time, services vary depending on individual needs and your resettlement agency. You may be referred to other agencies and organizations for answers to questions or to meet specific needs.

The resettlement agency is not responsible for paying your bills or debts. You will need to work, because you are responsible for your own expenses. If you consider moving to another community, remember that your resettlement agency is not responsible for transferring you. And the resettlement agency in the area you move to is not required to assist you. With the decision to move, you assume the responsibility for your own support. If you have a question about moving, talk to your resettlement agency staff.

Americans value self-reliance and will expect you to take the initiative in building your life in the United States. Success in your resettlement will depend as much on your attitude and efforts as on the type of help you receive.

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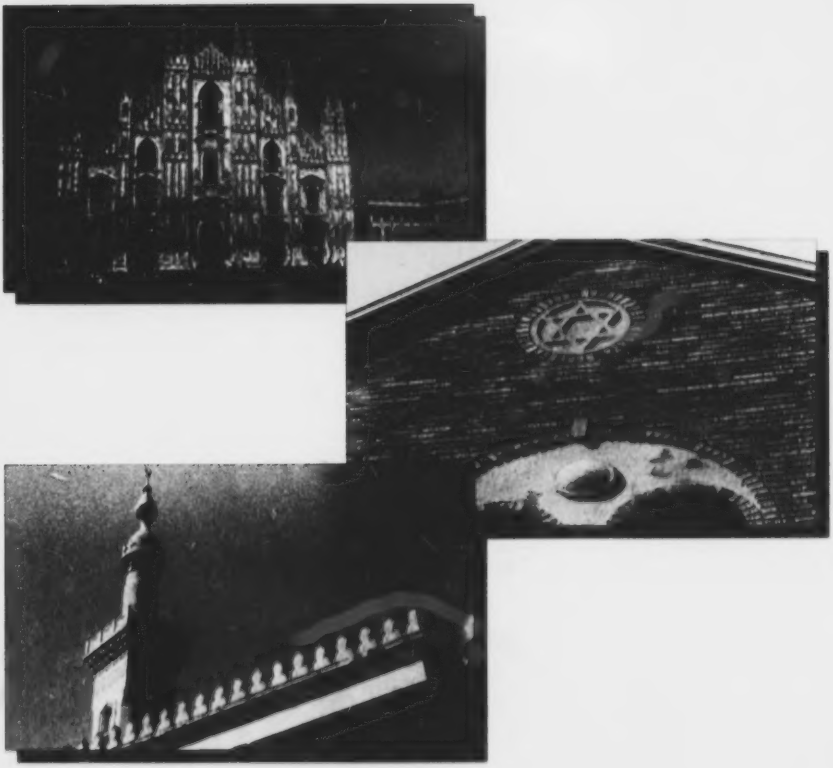
In addition to your resettlement agency, there are federal programs and community service agencies that help people to help themselves. Refugees are eligible for social services such as income support and family counseling, but the specific services and their availability vary from place to place. You will also need to find out if, as a refugee, you are eligible for additional services and how to apply. Your resettlement agency will help you learn about the types of services in your local community.

There are organizations and programs that will provide temporary assistance, if necessary, while you are working toward self-sufficiency. Eligibility for a service is often based on need, considering personal income, residency, age, or other factors. If your circumstances change or you fail to meet program requirements, these services can be terminated or reduced.

The resettlement agency is your first link to information and access to community services. Some of the organizations or services that resettlement staff may connect you with include the following:

Mutual assistance associations (MAAs), which exist in many communities, are organizations formed by former refugees and immigrants to help their own people. Some MAAs provide such services as community orientation, transportation, clothing, and furniture assistance to refugees and other newcomers.



Social service agencies provide a variety of services to the community as a whole, including refugees. These agencies generally assist people with special needs such as low-income families, the homeless, and people with disabilities.

Religious institutions such as churches, mosques, and synagogues not only serve as places of worship, but also may offer a variety of other services. Some have libraries or weekend classes for children; some distribute used clothing and furniture; others offer programs for newcomers or the elderly.

Food stamps is a federal program to provide adequate nutrition to people with low incomes. Refugees may apply for food stamps at a designated local government office. Applicants must complete forms that require proof of income and other personal information. The amount of food assistance is based on family size and income. Food stamps can be used to purchase food items only; non-food items, such as cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, diapers, paper products, or soap cannot be purchased with food stamps.

Energy assistance is a federal program which helps people with low incomes pay their heating expenses. Refugees are eligible to apply for energy assistance at a designated local government office. Applicants must complete forms that require proof of income and other personal information.

Cash assistance programs, intended for people who cannot secure employment, are administered at the local level and may differ between communities. Refugees may apply at the designated local office. Applicants must complete forms that require proof of income and other personal information. These cash assistance programs are limited to a number of months, and many have additional requirements, such as active participation in a job search or regular attendance at training programs.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program for people 65 and over or who are blind or disabled. Refugees who meet SSI eligibility requirements may apply at the local Social Security office, the same office where you apply for a Social Security card.

The **police** are responsible for enforcing the law and ensuring public safety. They also help people in less formal ways, such as responding to medical emergencies, working in inner city neighborhoods to improve community relations, and giving directions to those who are lost.

All communities have **fire departments** and **emergency medical services**. If you need help in an emergency, the telephone number to dial in most areas of the United States is **911**. If you have to use the 911 emergency number, be prepared to tell the operator the nature of your emergency ("police," "fire," or "ambulance") and your location. If you cannot explain the problem in English, just say, "Help" or "Emergency," and do not hang up the telephone. The open phone line will indicate where you are.

Knowing about services in your community and using them wisely will ease your adjustment to life in the United States. If you are fortunate enough to have friends or family near you, their support will be very important also. (More detailed information about community services may be found in "Education," p. 53, and "Health," p. 63.)

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When you first arrive in the United States, there will be a place ready for you to stay. You can expect that the initial accommodation will be furnished with necessities and will probably be in a working-class neighborhood, racially and ethnically mixed. Your first accommodations may be temporary. For your initial time in the United States, you may be staying with previously settled family members, in an apartment, in a hotel, or in a welcome center (usually associated with the resettlement agency). If single, you may be placed with other single refugees, at least temporarily.

The resettlement agency is responsible for ensuring that housing is provided for your first month in the United States. If you have relatives in the United States, they may be asked to make housing arrangements for you, and they may receive financial assistance from the resettlement agency.

Long-term housing arrangements will be discussed with you soon after you arrive. Finding a suitable place to live is not easy for most Americans and may be difficult for you. Your first home, although affordable, may not be your first choice. You will want to consider location, type of housing (apartment or house), and proximity to school, work, public transportation, and stores. You will need to talk with your resettlement agency, family, friends, and others about locations to consider when looking for housing. Expect that the search will take several weeks.

There are several types of housing in most American communities:

- apartment buildings,
- single-family houses,
- trailer homes,
- room in a house or an apartment.

Resources for locating housing include:

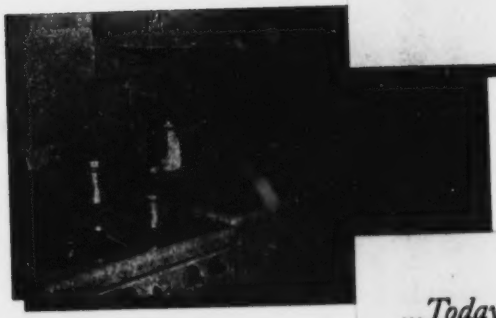
- friends,
- co-workers,
- resettlement agency,
- "For Rent" signs on or near buildings,
- rental offices in apartment buildings,
- newspapers ("Classified" section), and
- real estate agencies (which may charge a fee for service).

A rental apartment generally includes a kitchen with stove, sink, and refrigerator; a bathroom; one (or more) bedrooms; closets; and a living and dining room. In smaller apartments some of these rooms are combined.

You can expect housing rental costs to constitute a large percentage of your monthly expenses. The cost of housing differs from state to state, from city to city, and between communities within one area. The rent may include the cost of utilities (electricity, heat, water, gas, trash and garbage removal), or the utilities may be charged separately. Before signing a rental agreement, it is important to ask the landlord if utilities are included in the rent.

When renting an apartment or house, you must sign a rental agreement or lease. This is a legal paper that is for the protection of the tenant and the landlord. A lease protects you from unfair treatment by your landlord. And housing laws require that landlords meet minimum standards of safety and sanitation for rental property.

" For us it was such a beautiful apartment, full of things we had never seen before.



...Today I know that the people who live in this neighborhood are very poor. The apartments are small and boxy.

But together, my children and I scrubbed the walls of the apartment until they glowed in the weak sunlight, and we basked in the comfort of our new home. "

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In a lease you agree to the following items:

- the number of people living in the apartment,
- the date the rent is due (usually between the first and fifth of the month),
- that the apartment will be kept clean and without damage,
- the number of months you agree to stay (usually 12 months), and
- the terms for terminating the lease.

In addition to signing a lease, you may also be required to provide proof that the rent will be paid. If you are not working, you may need to find a "co-signer," someone who will sign with you. Renters are usually required to provide a security deposit when they sign the rental agreement. This amount, often equal to one month of rent, is returned to you when you leave the apartment if you have fulfilled the terms of your lease.

If you break the agreements in the lease, you can be evicted and lose your security deposit.

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Public transportation varies greatly across the United States. Many cities offer extensive public transportation systems (bus, subway, or commuter train) that allow people to lead active lives without a car. Taxis are also available, but are usually expensive. In other areas, public transportation is not easily available. Detailed information about local public transportation will be provided by your resettlement agency soon after your arrival.

In areas where public transportation is not available or convenient, newcomers may want to acquire their own car as soon as possible. However, there are many responsibilities in owning and driving a car in the United States.

To drive a car legally, a local driver's license is required; an international driver's license is not acceptable as a substitute. The minimum age at which one may obtain a driver's license varies from state to state. A driver's license can be obtained at the local department of motor vehicles after passing a written test, a vision test, and a driving test. Most states require that a car be insured.

"The other day I was riding the bus... When I looked around, I saw so many different kinds of people. There were white people, and African-American people and Hispanic people. And no one was paying attention to anyone, no one was looking at anyone, staring or pointing. I was also on the bus, and no one was paying the least attention to me or how I looked."

When considering buying a car you should keep in mind the cost of the following items:

- insurance (differs from state to state, but fees are higher for those who have no driving record in the United States),
- maintenance of the vehicle,
- gas,
- licenses, registration, required inspections, and taxes,
- parking.

A driver's license is not permanent. It must be renewed regularly, and breaking certain laws may result in losing your license. For example, driving while under the influence of alcohol can result in losing your driver's license, significant fines, and a jail sentence.

North America

New York → Los Angeles	(2,911 Miles/4,684 Kilometers)
New York → Chicago	(818 Miles/1,316 Kilometers)
New York → Miami	(1,325 Miles/2,132 Kilometers

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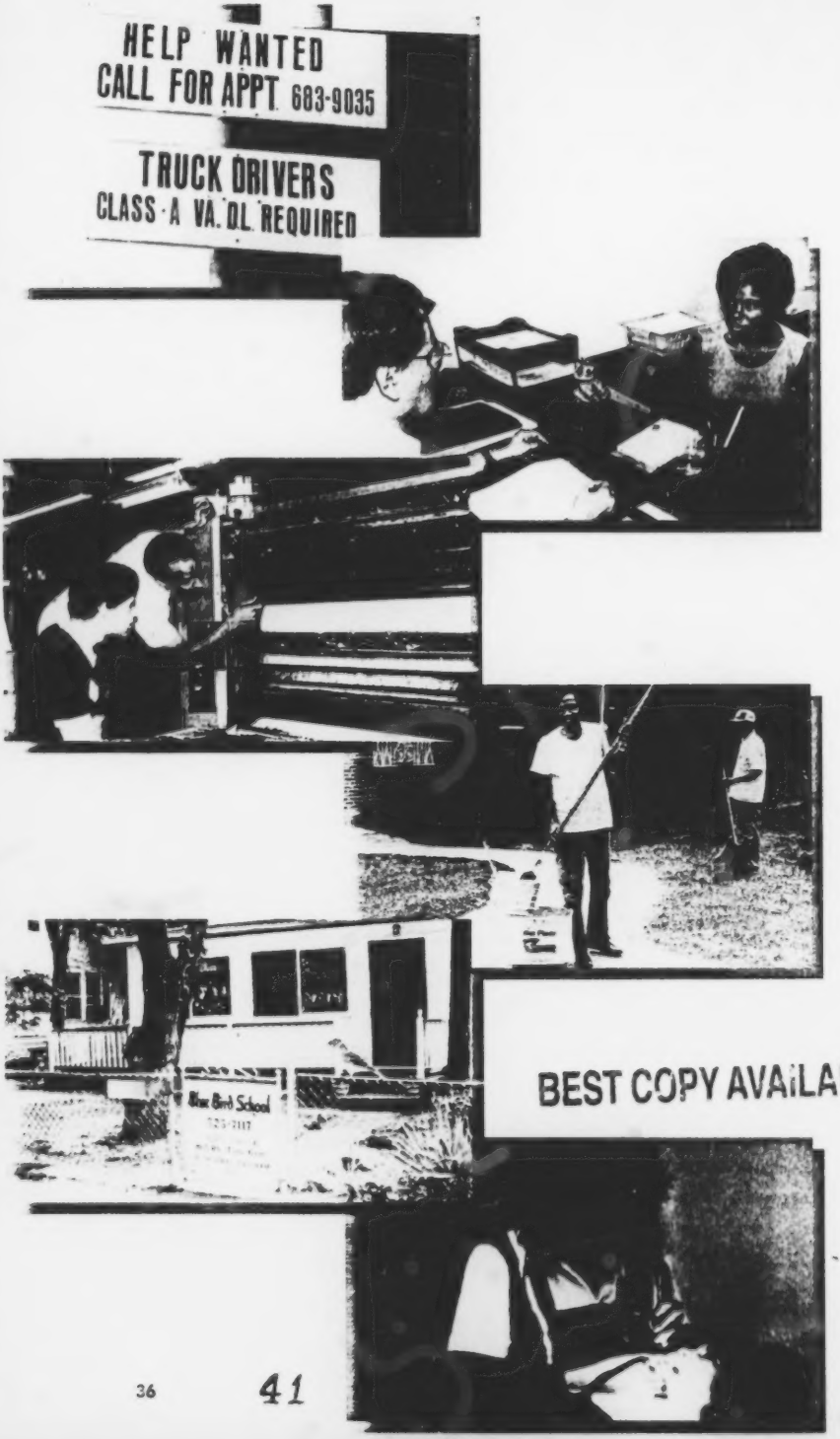

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In the United States, great value is placed on being employed. Therefore, working and becoming self-sufficient is one of the most important priorities for newly arrived refugees. You will be expected to take a job, even if it is not highly paid or in your former occupation.

One of your first goals after arriving in the United States will be to find a job. While you may receive some help from employment services which have been established to help refugees find jobs, your personal efforts and attitude are even more important. Employment is not guaranteed by the government or your resettlement agency. You will be competing with others for the same jobs, so it is essential to develop a positive attitude and demonstrate that you are ready to go to work.

Your first job will almost certainly be one of several that you will hold, and it will be an important step in establishing a work history in the United States. As your English skills improve through study and informal contacts with other Americans, your chances of moving to a better, higher-paying job also improve. Staying on the first job at least six months is an important step in creating a good work history. It is also important that you try to use English as much as possible, at work and elsewhere in the community.

Both men and women work in the United States. Women make up half the work force and perform the same jobs as men at all levels. Although it may not have been acceptable for women to work in your homeland, it is normal for them to do so in the United States. Having two incomes in the family will further your family's progress towards financial self-sufficiency. Children over the age of 15 may also work part-time, and many young people start their first job by working after school and during vacation time.

While your first goal should be to take any job, you should also begin setting long-range employment goals. These might be to acquire skills to get a better job or enter a new field, or return to your former profession. This will take careful planning, an understanding of the job market, and learning about special requirements to obtain certification or licensing. You will need to be patient during this process. You may find help and information from an employment counselor in your community, at your resettlement agency, or at a nearby community college or university.

Above all, remember that the United States is known as a land of opportunity for those who work hard. Most Americans believe in the importance of adults working to support themselves and their families rather than relying on cash assistance from the government. Most refugees continue to work on English language skills while they are employed, because a better command of the language often means better job opportunities. While life in the United States may seem confusing at first, as time passes you will learn more about your new country and the opportunities it provides.

Finding a Job

Your attitude is a key element in the search for a job, and potential employers will judge this by your appearance and behavior. Even if you speak little or no English, a smiling face and eagerness to work will help a great deal. Arrive on time for the job interview, looking clean and dressed appropriately. You will probably be quite nervous, but try to relax. Everyone feels anxious in this situation, regardless of how long they have lived in the United States. Don't be discouraged if you aren't hired after your first interview. It may take many interviews before you are hired. This is normal for all job seekers in the U.S.

You may receive help in finding your first job from resettlement agency staff or a refugee employment service. Staff at your resettlement agency are experienced in dealing with refugee employment. They have helped many other refugees find their first job in the United States. Discuss your ideas with them, but listen to their advice. They will try to provide a clear picture of the type of job you can expect to find with your skills and experience.

Most newspapers in the United States have "Help Wanted" or "Employment" sections which list job openings.

In addition, every state has public employment agencies which can help you without charging a fee. Your resettlement agency can tell you where those offices are located.

Friends, relatives, and members of the refugee community who arrived before you are also important sources of information about job openings. Ask if they know of any job vacancies where they work. Most newspapers in the United States have "Help Wanted" or "Employment" sections which list job openings.

There are also private employment agencies which charge a fee for helping you find a job. Some of these fees are quite high, and you should be certain that you understand their policies before signing a contract. If you do not understand, ask your resettlement agency for assistance.

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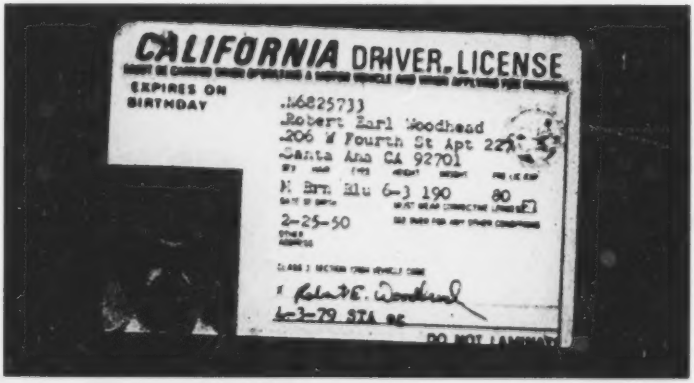
You will be required to show proof that you are authorized to work. Most refugees use the I-94 (which has been stamped by the INS for employment authorization), a Social Security card, and a photo ID (such as a passport or driver's license). You should always carry the originals of these documents to a job interview; a photocopy is not acceptable.



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Day Care

In many American families, both the mother and father work full time. This means they must make arrangements for their children to be cared for either all day or, in the case of older children, before or after school. Some schools, employers, and private companies provide this service, but usually the parents must pay a fee. Private individuals can also provide day care at home or in the neighborhood. Your resettlement agency staff can advise you about day care services in the community.

Types of Employment

There are three general types of employment in the United States, demanding different levels of experience or training:

Entry-level jobs are those which require little training or experience, such as hotel housekeeper, restaurant helper, or factory worker. They usually pay an hourly wage and don't require a high level of English. Many refugees work in these jobs while studying English or learning other skills.

Skilled labor jobs usually pay more, but require formal training, a higher level of English, and a demonstrated skill. Auto mechanic, beautician, electrician, or computer repairperson are examples of skilled labor jobs. Generally, skilled jobs pay an hourly or weekly wage which is higher than for most entry-level jobs, and even higher than for some professional jobs. Many skilled jobs require licensing or membership in a union; licenses from your homeland may not be accepted.

Professional jobs usually require at least a college degree, advanced English, and specific skills in that field. These take a long time to obtain, and may involve repeating training you already had in your homeland. Many professional jobs, such as medicine or dentistry, also require a license or certification for the state in which you work. Even if you are licensed in your own country, additional study and recertification tests will be required before you can practice in the United States. Most professional jobs are salaried, which means that the pay is a fixed amount for regular weekly or monthly time worked, rather than an hourly wage.

When developing your short-term and long-term employment goals, keep in mind that you will probably have to work at several different jobs before reaching your final goal. Perhaps this is different from what you experienced in your home country, but most Americans change jobs more than three or four times during their working years.

Pay, Deductions, and Benefits

There are federal and state wage laws which apply to all types of work. Before accepting a job, always determine what the regular pay will be. If you don't understand, make sure to ask. In addition to the actual pay, a variety of benefits may be included. Ask about these also. Once employed, you will be required to complete a form which reports your earnings to the Internal Revenue Service, the government agency which collects taxes.

Your paycheck will be given to you at the end of a regular period of time. This may be every week, every two weeks, or once a month. Some smaller companies may pay in cash, but you should always receive a pay stub or receipt that lists all hours worked, gross pay, net pay, and deductions. The first paycheck can be very confusing to a new worker, so ask a friend, relative, or your resettlement agency to explain it to you if you do not understand. It is important to check that payment and deductions have been figured correctly.

Gross pay is the total amount earned during the time period before any deductions are made. Look at the pay stub to check that the gross amount matches the wage level at which you were hired, multiplied by the number of hours you actually worked.

Deductions are the amounts taken from your gross pay during a pay period. Most deductions are required by law and include money for federal income tax, Social Security tax, Medicare tax, and, in most states, a state income tax. In addition, you may choose to have additional money deducted to pay for such things as medical insurance, union dues, life insurance, or a company savings plan.

Net pay is the amount you actually receive in your check after all deductions have been made.

Benefits are provided either by the employer directly or by the government through the taxes that are deducted from your pay as described above.

Health insurance is a benefit an employer may provide either at no cost to you or by your paying part of the cost. Some companies offer health insurance as a benefit to employees after they have worked for a set period of time, such as three months or six months. In many cases, your family can also be included in the insurance plan if you pay an additional amount. Not all employers pay health benefits, but many do. Health costs can be quite high in the United States, so this is an important benefit to consider.

Additional benefits which may be offered by your employer include **sick leave**, **vacation time**, and **retirement plans**. Company policies differ greatly, so you should learn as much as possible about your employer's policies when you are hired. In some cases,

benefits change the longer you work for the company. For example, workers who have spent a number of years with an employer receive more vacation time than newer employees. It is important to ask questions of your employer's personnel office, resettlement agency staff, friends, sponsor, or others who can help you gain full and accurate information about benefit programs.

Other work-related benefits include the three described below.

Social Security is a federal government retirement insurance program. The cost is shared between the employer and employee. Social Security benefits are based on your U.S. wage history and are available to workers who have contributed to the program through taxes.

Unemployment insurance, supported by taxes paid by the employer, is available to those who lose their jobs through reasons outside their control.

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Workers' Compensation is available in most states and provides some salary and medical coverage for workers injured on the job.

Employment Rights

As a refugee, you have the same employment rights in the United States that every American citizen has. An employer may not discriminate against you because of your refugee status or deny you a job or a promotion because of your age, color, handicap, marital status, ethnic or national origin, race, religion, or sex. There are, however, some jobs that are open only to American citizens, such as most jobs with the Federal government. Employment laws also protect workers from unsafe working conditions and sexual harassment in the workplace.

On the Job: Tips for Success

Resettlement agencies and many refugees find that there are several things to keep in mind when you first start to work in the United States. They are important not only in helping you keep your job, but also in helping you advance and find better jobs in the future.

Be on time for work. Punctuality is a highly valued quality in the United States, and you will make a positive impression on your employer if you are always on time. If you arrive late to work, your pay may be reduced by any time missed. Take time off for illness only if you are very sick. Most Americans continue working if they have a minor cold, and many pride themselves on never missing a day at work. Always call your supervisor if you are going to be late or absent for any reason.

Be friendly with your supervisor and co-workers. Lunch hour and break times can be a good time to socialize. Casual conversation topics in the United States include the weather, weekend activities, food, and sports. There will also be many opportunities to share your culture with them, especially around traditional holiday periods.

Be productive at work. You can be friendly without spending too much time talking to co-workers or friends. Ask questions if you don't understand the job, but avoid personal conversations and phone calls during work time.

Ask questions. If you do not understand something, don't be afraid to ask a co-worker or your supervisor. You will do a better job and your employer will respect you.

Take the initiative to learn new tasks and responsibilities. Advancement in any job can begin with your demonstrating an interest or willingness to assume additional responsibilities.

You may switch jobs to take a new or better job with a different company. However, always give your employer at least two weeks notice. Never quit one job before finding a new one, and try to keep the first job at least six months to establish a good work history.

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In the United States, education is accessible to everyone, regardless of a person's age, race, religion, or social class. Public education is free and required by law for all children ages 6 to 16, and may also be available for children older or younger, depending on local school district regulations. Alternatively, parents may enroll children in private schools, many of which have religious affiliations, but tuition at these schools is often expensive. Beyond high school, education can be quite expensive.

Most Americans view education as a way to qualify for more satisfying jobs and improve their standard of living. After deciding to continue their education, adults usually continue working full-time and attend courses in the evening or on the weekend.

Public Education for Children

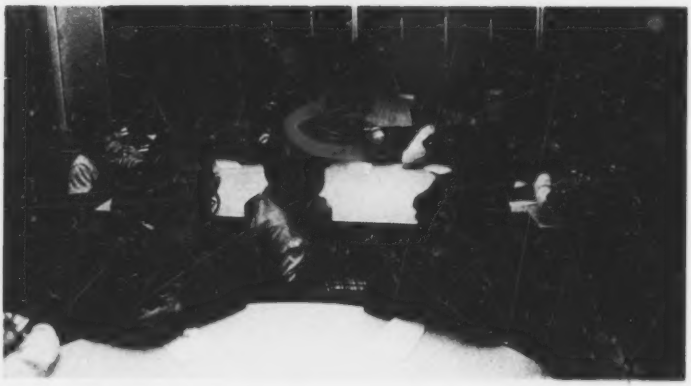
In American public schools, children from different racial, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds study and interact together in classrooms and during out-of-class activities. Children with physical or mental disabilities must also attend school. In these cases, the school assesses the child's disability and discusses with the parents a plan for the child's education.

Children should be enrolled in school as soon as possible after arrival. Your resettlement agency will help with school enrollment. Most schools require the child's immunization records and medical histories. Although public education is free, there are expenses which parents pay, such as those for pencils, paper, other supplies, and fees for special activities.

In general, there are three levels of education. **Primary education** starts at kindergarten when children are five years old and continues to the end of fifth or sixth grade. **Junior high or middle school** follows (usually grades six to eight), and **senior high school** (usually grades nine to twelve) is the last level. Students who successfully finish high school receive a high school diploma. Newly arriving students are generally placed in a grade on the basis of age and previous academic study. Younger children speaking little English may be placed in a lower grade at first.

Classes usually begin in August or September and end in May or June. Most children attend classes about six hours a day, Monday through Friday. If the school is too far from your home for your child to walk, school buses may provide free transportation to school. Children can take lunch to school or buy low-cost, nutritious lunches in the school cafeteria.

School attendance is very important. When students miss school, parents are expected to provide a written



explanation, and students are expected to make up the school work they missed.

Boys and girls are taught together in the same classroom in almost all public schools. The American way of teaching may be very different from that in other countries. Teachers encourage children to learn by thinking and analyzing more than through rote memorization. Students participate by asking questions and joining in discussions and activities, even if they do not yet speak much English.

There is no national curriculum in the United States; each state and local school district decides what should be taught. In general, however, most students study English, mathematics, social studies, science, and physical education. Art, music, and foreign languages are also usually offered. In addition to classes during the regular day, most schools, particularly at the high school level, offer a range of sport and club activities during and after school hours.

One of the biggest challenges for children is learning English, especially the language needed for school work, and most learn quickly. Many schools have special English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for new arrivals; others offer assistance through a special teacher or a tutor. Most newcomers face adjustment problems in their first year of school. Children may feel lonely at first, but as their ability to communicate improves, they make friends and feel more comfortable at school.

Many students and their parents are surprised by the informal behavior and dress of American students. American public schools give students freedom to make choices, but they are also expected to obey school rules. If they break the rules, students may be required to do additional homework, stay after school, be denied permission to participate in certain activities, or be suspended from school for a few days. Physical punishment is not permitted in most U.S. schools.

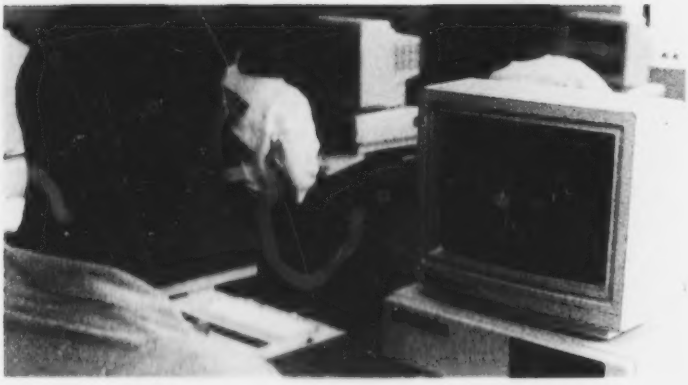
Some schools, particularly large ones in big cities, have problems with youth gangs and fighting between racial

or ethnic groups. In some areas, there have also been problems with students bringing drugs or weapons to school. If students feel threatened or confused, they should avoid confrontation and talk to a teacher, school counselor, or tutor.

Parents or guardians are expected to play an active role in the education of their children. They are encouraged to visit the school, get to know their children's teachers, and attend school meetings, even if they do not speak much English. Many schools offer information specifically for limited-English-speaking parents. Schools in the United States. try to help parents understand their children's education.

Education for Adults

Most Americans view education as a life-long process, and many enroll in courses at some time during their adult life. Because few can afford to quit their jobs and study full time, most Americans work at the same time they are studying.



While newcomers are expected to work, they can also pursue their education. Many take English classes. Others seek employment training, although most vocational and professional training requires advanced English. Once you are settled into the community, you will learn more about the educational opportunities available. You will probably have little opportunity for higher education during your first year in the United States. Over time, however, work on an advanced degree or professional certification is possible. It is important that families work together to plan how to obtain and finance education for adults in the family.

English as a Second Language

Most communities offer English classes through adult education programs. These classes are open to everyone. Men and women of different ages, education, and ethnic background study together. Classes usually focus on communication in the community and the workplace. Beginning-level classes usually emphasize the spoken English necessary to meet basic needs and become self-

sufficient. In intermediate and advanced classes, there is more attention to grammar, reading, and writing.

Studying with a volunteer tutor is another way to learn English, and can also be a good way to learn about American culture and customs. Adult education staff or your resettlement agency may have information about volunteer tutoring programs. Commercial language schools also offer English classes, but these are usually expensive.

In addition to ESL classes, adult education programs offer a variety of classes for the general public. Typical subjects include bookkeeping, foreign languages, and computer instruction. Most are not designed for students with limited English. General Education Development (GED) classes help adults earn high school diplomas; other classes help with citizenship preparation. Refugees must pay the same fees as other residents for adult education.

"And that is how I learned. I said, I will make English the key. If the door to the house is locked, you cannot get in without the key. To understand how to do in this country, you must have English. English is the key to unlock the door into America."

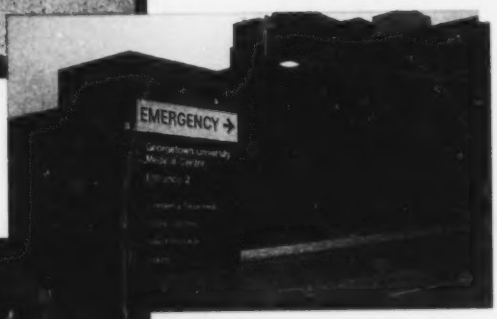
Other Training and Higher Education

Vocational and technical schools train people for specific skilled occupations, such as auto mechanics, computer programming, and medical and dental assistants. Usually these programs require a high level of English and payment of a tuition fee.

There are two major types of higher education in the United States: junior or community colleges and universities or colleges. Community colleges offer two-year programs which also prepare students for specific vocations, such as electronic repair or nursing. Students qualify for some licenses in two years, or they can begin in a two-year academic program and then transfer to a four-year program. Colleges or universities offer four-year programs. College students are usually required to complete a general curriculum before specializing in a field such as physics, mathematics, or history, or in preparation for advanced study in law or medicine. These institutions require very high levels of English

proficiency and may require that non-native speakers of English pass a language test before enrolling. Higher education is expensive, but most institutions have a financial aid office that provides information about student loans and scholarships.

People with advanced degrees from their native country in areas such as medicine or engineering may need U.S. recertification before being allowed to practice their profession in the United States. This process can be expensive and take a long time. It requires proof of education and qualification in the individual's native country, plus qualifying scores on English language tests. Refugees seeking to re-enter their professions frequently take a less-specialized job in their field while they prepare for recertification. A physician, for example, may work as a laboratory assistant until recertification is obtained.



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Health care in the United States includes a variety of systems offering different types of services. It is important that you ask your resettlement agency for information on health care in your community.

Soon after arrival in the U.S., you and your family may be contacted to arrange for a **preventive health screening**. The purpose of this screening is to identify and treat any health problem which may interfere with your resettlement, including your ability to obtain employment or attend classes. The screening, which is free of charge, may be at a public health office, a community health center, or a doctor's office.

In the U.S., each individual, not the government, is generally responsible for paying for health services. The cost of health care is high, so most people rely on insurance programs, often through their employer.

Health insurance can be obtained for a monthly payment. Some employers offer insurance and may pay all or part of the monthly payment. There is usually a waiting period from the time you are hired until you become eligible for health insurance. There are many insurance companies offering different types of programs. Health maintenance organizations (HMOs) are an increasingly common form of insurance program. Through this system, care is provided by a group of private doctors and clinics. Each member of an HMO has an assigned doctor who provides primary care and must approve any visits to emergency rooms, hospitals, or specialists. In some situations, the full cost of medical care will be paid by the insurance company; in others you will be required to pay part of the costs.

To assist people with low incomes, there are government programs which cover some medical expenses. The government programs described here may be changing. Ask staff at your resettlement agency to help you obtain accurate, up-to-date information about health services available to you.

Refugees are eligible to apply for **Refugee Medical Assistance**(RMA) or **Medicaid** at a designated local government office. Both programs pay for medical care for people with low incomes. Applicants must complete a form (or forms) that require proof of income and other personal information.

Health care services are different in every community. In most cases, an appointment is required for medical, dental, or mental health care. You will need to learn about the health services available in your community, some of which are described below.

The Public Health Department—Most offices provide immunizations against diseases and offer other preventive health services, including testing and treatment for tuberculosis. For refugees, these services are free or very inexpensive. Parents should be sure to check with the Public Health Department about immunizations for their children. All children enrolling in public school must submit proof of receiving required immunizations.

Private doctors—These physicians provide general and specialized health care. The doctor's office usually requires proof of ability to pay or insurance information at the time of appointment. Some doctors work as part of a private clinic or in a group with other general practitioners and specialists.

Community clinics or health centers—These are supported by government and private sources. They accept private insurance and Medicaid, or charge fees based on the uninsured patient's income.

Hospitals—These institutions may be found in almost every American community. Doctors or clinics refer patients with special problems to the hospital for tests and surgery. Hospital care is expensive, and hospitals require proof of insurance or ability to pay for those services.

Emergency rooms—These facilities in hospitals or elsewhere are for sudden, extreme health problems. Often busy, emergency rooms require no appointment, but a long wait may be necessary. For most health problems, you should call or make an appointment with a doctor. Use the emergency room only when absolutely necessary. Emergency care is usually provided regardless of your insurance or ability to pay.

Ambulance service—This service provides transportation and medical help when needed immediately and there is no other way to take the injured or sick person to receive emergency medical care. Ambulance services usually charge a fee after service has been provided.

Dental care—This is provided through private dentists and through clinics. Free or low-cost dental services are rare, but may be available through public health or community clinics. Not all health insurance plans include coverage for dental services.

Mental health care—This can be provided through private doctors and therapists and through clinics. Some mental health services may be available through mutual assistance associations and family service agencies. Some resettlement agencies provide counseling services and can help you find other mental health services.

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Living expenses in the United States are often high, and refugees need to be extremely careful about budgeting, saving money, and using credit.

Managing Your Income

It is essential to know how to manage your money when living on a limited income. Typically, your "fixed expenses" will be:

Rent—This will usually be the largest item and the first one for which you should budget.

Utilities—Electricity, gas, water, and garbage collection. Some of these may be included in your rent, but you may have to pay for one or more separately. Costs for heating or air conditioning fluctuate with the seasons.

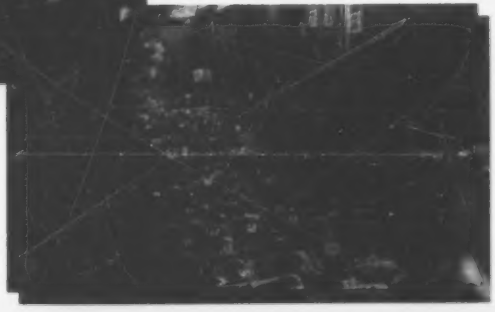
Food—When possible, shop at larger stores, where prices are often lower. Compare products to find the brand that gives more for the best price.

Transportation—You should consider the cost of travel to and from your job each day, shopping trips, and other routine transportation needs. In many places, monthly discount passes for buses or subways are available.

Telephone—Remember that long distance calls are very expensive. Long distance calls are generally less expensive on Saturday and Sunday and late at night.

"A few years after I came to the United States, I decided it was time to buy a car. When I applied for a loan from the car dealer, the loan officer asked me if I had ever taken out a loan before.

I said I had and showed him the IOM loan that I had paid off. Because I showed that I could pay off the loan, my loan application was approved."



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Where to Shop

There are many different types of stores and markets in the United States, and the sorts of goods and services offered by each vary greatly. Here are five types of shopping places:

Supermarkets—These are the most common type of food store. In addition, most also sell cleaning products, cosmetics, magazines, some clothing and household items, and non-prescription drugs. Many people reduce the cost of shopping by using discount coupons and purchasing supermarket store brands or brands being sold at temporarily lower "sale" prices.

Department stores—These stores sell clothing, furniture, appliances, hardware, shoes, and other non-food items. Some of them are "discount stores," where prices are lower.

Thrift shops—These shops sell used items at very reasonable prices. Most people take pride in finding "bargains."

Ethnic foodstores—These food stores, often owned and managed by immigrants or former refugees, may be found in your community or a nearby city if there is a large population of an ethnic group there. You may find familiar foods from your homeland in an ethnic food store.

Yard sales or garage sales—These are advertised in the newspaper or on signs in the neighborhood. At these sales, people sell items from their homes, usually at very low prices. They are excellent places to buy household items, furniture, or clothing.

Sales Tax

Consumers in most states pay a sales tax in addition to the cost of the item. (Some items, such as food or medicine, may be exempt.) This tax is a percentage of the cost of the item and is calculated at the cash register. The price on an item or on the store shelf usually does not include the sales tax.

Other Taxes

The federal, state, and some city governments collect income taxes. Also, local governments collect property taxes on homes, buildings, land, and sometimes personal property such as automobiles. These taxes help support many of the services used by all residents, including refugees.

Banking

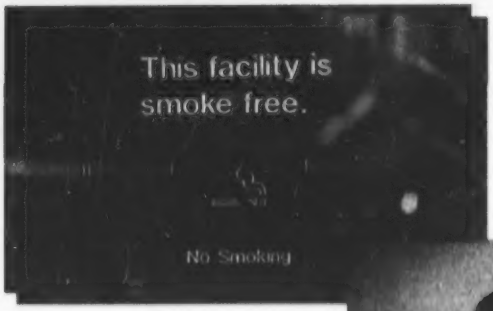
To keep their money safe from loss or theft, Americans generally keep their money in a financial institution such as a bank, savings and loan association, or credit union, rather than at home or with them. Financial institutions pay interest on the money kept in some types of accounts, but usually charge fees for services

such as checking accounts or credit cards. Most people have a checking account from which they write checks to pay their bills.

Using Credit

Credit card purchases and "buying on credit" (buying goods or services and paying for them over a period of time) is common in the United States. Many businesses offer goods and services on credit to enable people to buy things they cannot otherwise afford. Newcomers should be cautious about using credit cards or credit plans to buy such items as appliances, furniture, or automobiles. The total cost of such purchases is especially high because of interest charges added on to the price. If a purchaser misses a payment, the company can take back the product without refunding the money already paid, and the purchaser may have problems obtaining credit or loans in the future. Also, beware of advertised credit card schemes that sound "too good to be true."

Refugees should set aside part of their income to repay their travel loan. This will help establish a good credit rating in the United States. It is much easier to get a loan if you can show that you have repaid a loan in the past. Ask your resettlement agency for information about how to repay the travel loan.



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Transitional Resettlement Services: A Review

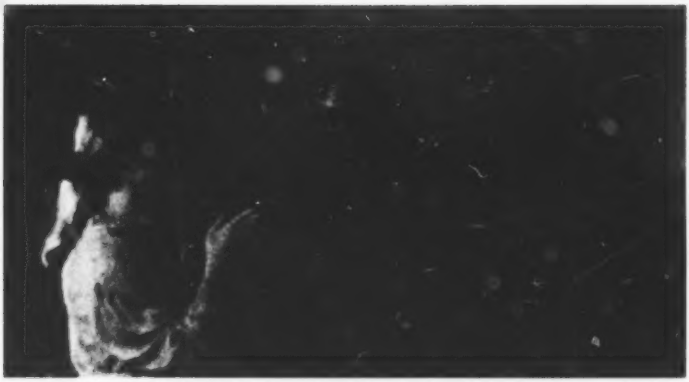
"Role of the Resettlement Agency," p. 17, discusses the services you are entitled to receive from your resettlement agency. It is your responsibility to make the best use of these services, which are available for only a brief time. Keep the resettlement agency informed of your progress in resettlement, speak candidly with the staff there about your desires and concerns, and try to be flexible.

"Employment," p. 37, discusses your responsibilities as an employee. Even if your first job is not as professionally satisfying as you would like, your performance on that job will be considered carefully by future employers, so it is critical that you do your best in any job.

"Education," p. 53, discusses the responsibilities of parents who have children in school. Try to take an active part in your child's education.

Laws in the United States

As a refugee, you are entitled to many of the same rights as everyone else living in the United States. All residents are entitled to protection of these rights in employment, housing, education, and eligibility for government services, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, or other differences. Laws in the United States are intended to protect your rights. As a resident of the United States, you should have a basic knowledge of your legal rights and responsibilities.



If you are accused of a crime in the United States, you are considered innocent until proven guilty. You have a right to an attorney who will represent you in court. If you cannot afford an attorney, the court will appoint one to represent you. However, if you break the law, the resettlement agency cannot "solve" the problem by intervening.

American Laws That May Differ from Laws in Your Country

- In many places in the United States, it is illegal to smoke in public places such as theaters or offices. In other places, such as restaurants, people who smoke must remain in designated areas. If you smoke, ask your resettlement agency about the laws in your area.
- It is illegal to purchase, sell, or use narcotics or other addictive drugs and controlled substances. You should check with your resettlement agency regarding drugs that may have been legal in your home country but which are controlled or illegal in the United States.

- It is illegal to drive a car if you do not have a U.S. driver's license or if you have been drinking alcohol.
- Many states have laws regarding the safety of children in automobiles. For example, parents may be required to use seatbelts for children and special safety seats for infants. There are similar seatbelt laws for adults.
- Physical abuse of your spouse or your child is illegal.
- Sex with minors (under 18 years of age in most states) is illegal.
- Offensive comments or behavior of a sexual nature in the workplace (sexual harassment) is illegal.
- Male refugees between the ages of 18 and 25 must register with the Selective Service, a government agency which can call individuals for military service, usually in time of war. At present, all members of the U.S. armed forces are volunteers.
- In most places, it is not legal to hunt game or fish without a license, and you must learn and obey other laws relating to these activities.

Legal Status and Citizenship

Admission as a refugee allows you to reside permanently in the United States and eventually to apply for citizenship. For your first year in the United States, you will be in refugee status. It is advisable to carry your I-94 card with you at all times as proof of your legal status. As a refugee, you can:

- travel anywhere within the United States,
- buy property,
- be employed,
- attend school, and
- sponsor your spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age if you have been separated from them. If you wish to have your spouse or children join you in the United States, your resettlement agency will explain the necessary requirements and procedures to you.

Basic freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly are protected for everyone in the United States, including refugees. (Some resettlement agencies are affiliated with religious groups, but you are under no obligation to participate in their religious activities.)

While you hold refugee status, you cannot obtain a U.S. passport, join the military, vote in U.S. elections, or be employed in government jobs which require U.S. citizenship. You may not travel outside the United States without receiving permission from the INS. If you must travel overseas, your resettlement agency will explain

how to request permission. If you return to your country of origin while you are a refugee, you may jeopardize your refugee status and may not be permitted to re-enter the United States.

After one year in the United States, you can apply to become a "permanent resident." Permanent residents can travel overseas (although they should not stay more than one year abroad) and can be members of the U.S. military, but they cannot vote in U.S. elections, work for a foreign government, or hold U.S. government jobs for which citizenship is a requirement. Your resettlement agency will explain how to become a permanent resident.

After four and a half years in the United States, you can apply for citizenship. The INS or your resettlement agency can explain the requirements for citizenship. Among them are a good moral character and a basic knowledge of English and of U.S. history and government. Naturalized citizens enjoy the same rights and privileges as native-born Americans.

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The United States is a nation of immigrants who brought with them a variety of cultural traditions and practices. This unique diversity means there is no single uniform "American culture." However, there are certain standards of behavior which are accepted in the United States, and they may be different from your own culture. Some of these customs and attitudes may seem strange or even contradict some of the accepted behaviors in your country. The process of learning about American behaviors and values and coping with them is part of cultural adjustment. Making this adjustment does not mean you have to give up all aspects of your cultural identity.

Americans value the principle of equality of all people, whatever their race, religion, gender, or ethnic background, believing that we all should have the same human rights and protections. Most Americans hold a negative opinion about people who express prejudice or discriminate unfairly against other individuals. There are strict laws related to housing and the workplace preventing discrimination based on race, religion, or ethnic background.

The roles of men and women in the United States may differ from those in your home country. Americans believe in equality of the sexes and value self-sufficiency and independence for both men and women. You may find that roles within your family change, but this is a normal part of the resettlement process. More than one income is often essential to meet basic expenses. As a

result of this, both parents may need to be employed and to share child care responsibilities.

Laws govern some aspects of relationships within the family, such as those that protect women and children from physical abuse. Domestic violence laws prohibit the use of physical force against a spouse or family member. There are also laws which restrict the use of physical force in disciplining children. Not taking proper care of children can be considered "child neglect," which may lead to intervention by child protection agencies.

Many misconceptions about American life exist, partly because movies and TV do not present a balanced view of life in the United States. These media, which usually seek to entertain rather than educate, do not generally present typical American values, realities, or behavior. All newcomers to the United States arrive with some misconceptions about this country. You must try to be observant, flexible, and open to change. A good beginning is to ask questions about behavior that puzzles you.

Coping With Culture Shock

Culture shock includes the normal feelings of being helpless or frustrated in a country where one neither speaks the language nor understands the culture. Anyone going to live in a new country will experience a certain degree of culture shock. Symptoms include:

- frustration at not being able to accomplish daily tasks such as shopping or taking public transportation,
- difficulty in sleeping or feeling tired during the day,
- irritability or feelings of anger,
- loss of appetite or feelings of indifference.

These feelings are usually temporary and diminish over time. Many newcomers to the United States have experienced these feelings and have become stronger and more capable as they dealt with them. Ways to cope with culture shock vary among cultures and individuals. It may be helpful to get back to a favorite activity or listen to familiar music. One strategy used by nearly all newcomers is to join groups, particularly mutual assistance associations formed by and for a particular nationality or ethnic group.

To rebuild a life requires patience and hard work. Your days will be very busy, but the more active you are, and the more you take responsibility for your own life, the more successful you will be in resettlement.

Tips for Everyday Living

Informality—Americans tend to be very informal. In social situations first names are usually used. In business situations, last names are used more often, especially before a formal introduction has taken place. Many supervisors and most co-workers may prefer to be called by their first name. Professional titles, such as "Doctor" (Ph.D.) are generally reserved for formal business situations. The smile is very important and is used in greeting both friends and strangers.

Punctuality—Time is highly valued. Americans try to be punctual and expect punctuality from others. Making and keeping appointments is necessary in private and public life. If you do not make an appointment before

visiting a business office, you may not be seen, and if you cannot keep an appointment or you expect to be more than 15 minutes late, you should call and explain what has detained you.

Privacy—Americans place a high value on personal privacy, despite the informality of their lifestyle. People seldom visit each other's homes without calling ahead or being invited first. Financial matters are considered to be private. It is considered impolite to ask how much someone earns or what he paid for his house, car, etc. It is also considered impolite to ask personal questions of someone you don't know or have just met.

Personal hygiene—Most Americans bathe or shower every day, brush their teeth often, shampoo their hair very often, and wash their clothes frequently. There are hundreds of products—deodorants, mouthwashes, shampoos, and detergents—especially formulated for these purposes.

Tipping—It is customary to give a tip of 15% or 20% of the bill to a waiter in a restaurant or to a taxi driver. It is not appropriate to give money or tips to a police officer or any government official as thanks for assistance.

Smoking—Many Americans do not smoke, and they may expect others to refrain from smoking in their homes or places of work. There are also some restaurants and other public places, such as stores and public buses, where smoking is prohibited, or allowed in one section only.

Alcohol—Although alcohol is consumed in the United States, there are many laws regulating its sale and use. These laws vary from locality to locality, and in some places are very strict. In all parts of the U.S., driving while under the influence of alcohol is a serious crime. Doing so may result in imprisonment, fines, and/or loss of your driver's license. Children may not drink until they reach the age of 18-21, depending upon locality; nor may young people under these ages buy liquor in stores. It is never impolite to refuse to drink liquor in the U.S.

Safety—Although crime and violence exist in the United States, the crime rate differs throughout the country. No matter where you live, however, you should take basic precautions, such as locking your home and car, never carrying large amounts of cash with you, and knowing which neighborhoods to avoid at night.

Papers to carry—You should always carry a copy of your Form I-94. You should also always carry the name, address, and phone number of your resettlement agency. If you do not speak English, carry your own telephone number and address, or the address and telephone number of anyone you are about to visit.

"My feelings about this country are now very different from when I first came here. When I was in Vietnam, I thought coming to America was like heaven or something. That's what people were telling me. Now, I don't imagine it's like a heaven. It's just better than Vietnam."

"Although we are living in America, we still have the right to remember and keep our traditions. We still learn about American lives and customs. We still copy and follow some of them, but at the same time we have to know that although we don't have our own country, we still remember, recognize and treasure our culture. Welcome to all of you who are to come here."

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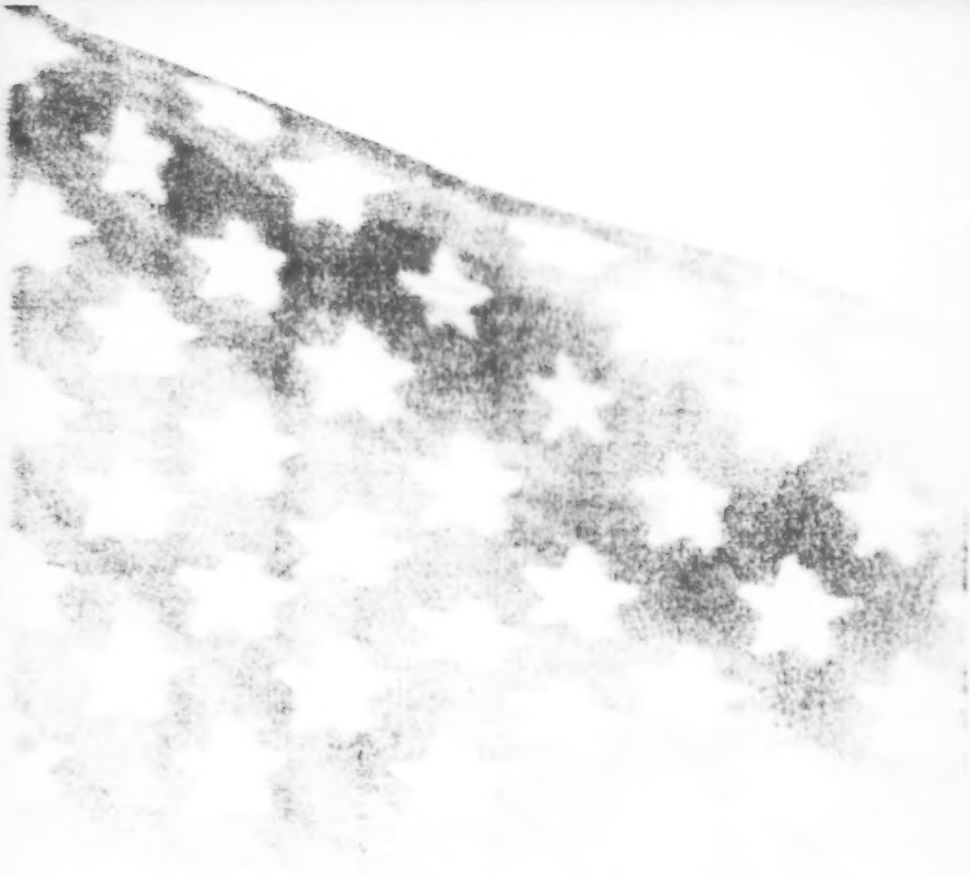
"You cannot learn everything about this life in two months. It takes years and years."

"I have changed in the past year. I don't feel so homesick now as I was in the beginning and I'm not afraid of new things anymore. I learned how to get a better job by learning English."



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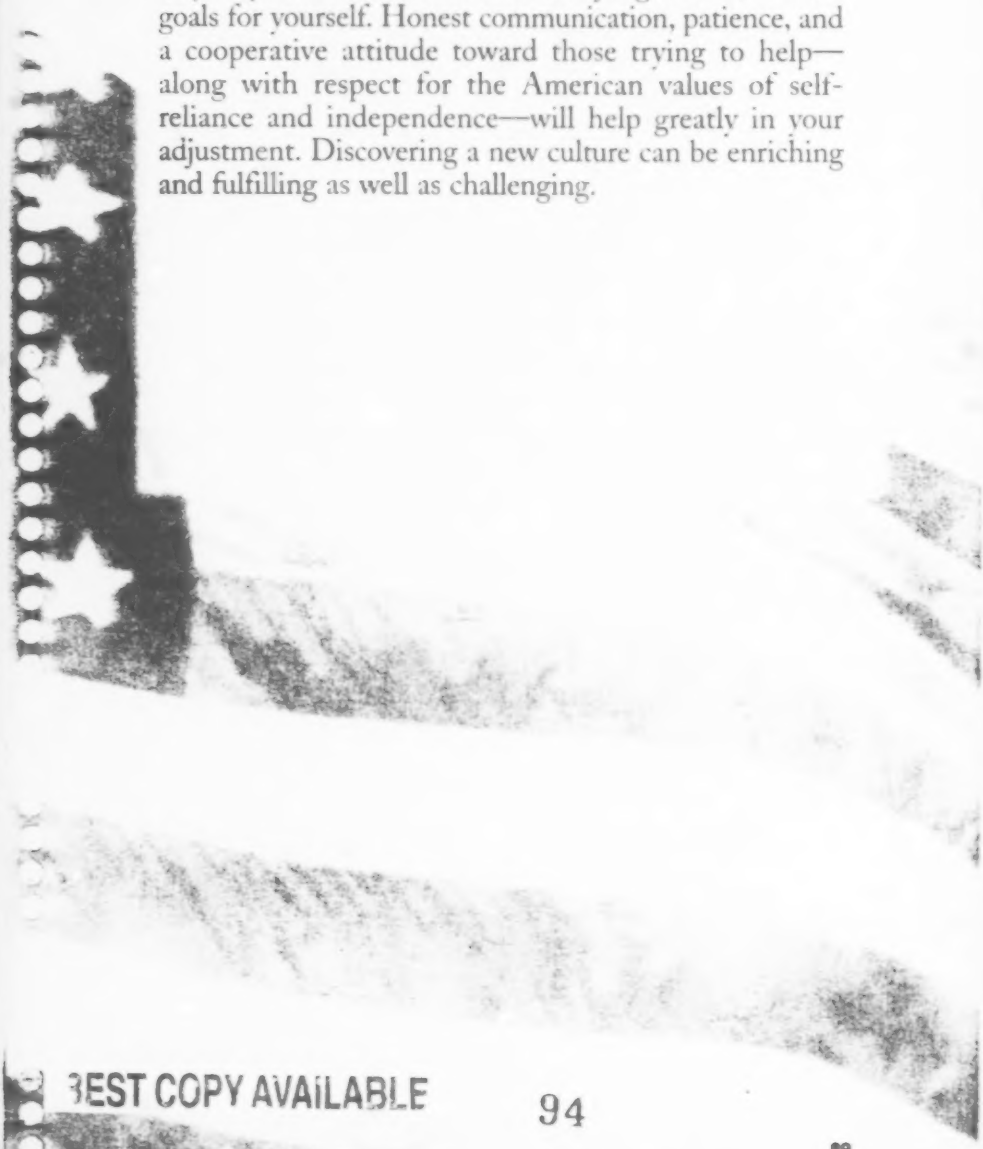
Resettlement is a long process. You may need from two to five years to adjust fully to life in your new community. Try to be observant and non-judgmental, and set goals for yourself. Honest communication, patience, and a cooperative attitude toward those trying to help—along with respect for the American values of self-reliance and independence—will help greatly in your adjustment. Discovering a new culture can be enriching and fulfilling as well as challenging.



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